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THE SHORT STORY

Edited by MANJERI S. ISVARAN

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Illustrations by * C. Sivaramamurti. † A. K. Sekar. †† Natarajan.

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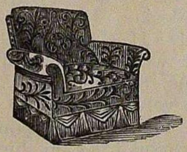

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The WHISPERING GALLERY of LIFE & LETTERS

(This section is devoted to Editorial Comments on current topics of interest)

The truly great
Have all one age, and from one visible place
Shed influence. They, both in power and act,
Are permanent, and Time is not with them,
Save as it worketh for them, they in it.—

COLERIDGE

It is in the highest degree unphilosophic to call language or diction the dress of our thoughts . . . It is the incarnation of our thoughts.—

WORDSWORTH

Mr Norman Douglas

SOUTH WIND, *Siren Land*, *Fountains in the Sand*, *Old Calabria*, are the few books on which Mr Norman Douglas won his literary reputation. Mr Douglas has travelled widely and has a wide experience of men and things; Karlsruhe, Capri, Florence, pre-War St. Petersburg are some of the places where he has lived ; these and the many people he met are to be found in *Looking Back* (Chatto and Windus, 16s.), his autobiographical excursion—'the promenade,' he says, 'into the past and into regions which I shall never see again.' The youth of his day lived in stirring times, 'lived with greater zest than the present generation seems able to do.' Life in Karlsruhe, as the following excerpt evidences, is as exciting as a Parisian apache's. 'We were sitting late at night in our favourite tavern, six or seven of us, and all fairly befuddled ; there was a new comer that evening, a young fellow named Koenig. He was drunk as a lord, and so was Kappmeier. These two started a furious quarrel which we vainly tried to quell, and on Kappmeier's making some peculiarly offensive remark the other whipped out a revolver and had a shot at him across the table : just one, for somebody threw up his arm. Sober, he could not have missed. As it was the bullet struck the wall between Kappmeier's head and my own.'

Mr Douglas writes with great gusto, seems to live 'with vital feelings of delight' in the scenes he has reconstructed ; he flashes his characters—Rupert Brooke, Elroy Flecker, Frank Harris, Joseph Conrad, D. H. Lawrence who 'opened a little window for the bourgeoisie' are some of them—prismatically and as incisively. Surely, Mr Norman Douglas has looked back upon the incidents and personalities in his life through the kaleidoscope of reminiscence.

" *Ranji* "

'IF India had sought to make herself heard and understood by the people

who control her from afar, she could not have found a more triumphant missionary than the Jam Sahib, with his smile and his bat. Great Indians come to us frequently, men of high scholarship, rare powers of speech, noble character—the Gokhales, the Bannerjees, the Tagores. They come and they go, unseen and unheard by the multitude. The Jam Sahib has brought the East into the heart of our happy holiday crowds, and has taught them to think of it as something human and kindly, and keenly responsive to the joys that appeal to us. . . . His name will live in the hearts of hundreds of thousands of British people, to whom he has given happy days and happy memories.' So wrote Mr A. G. Gardiner when Maharaja Jam Sahib of Nawanagar was the king of a great game, and the quotation can be said to sum up fairly Mr Roland Wild's well-written biography, *Ranji* (Rich and Cowan, 15s.), at once an excellent cricket memoir and an interesting book to any student of Indian politics. The son of Jiwansinghi, a Rajput squire and direct descendant of a former Jam, Ranji was born at Saroda in 1872, and was secretly adopted by the Maharaja Vibhaji. He went to England in 1889 and he had not been long here before he began to make his mark as a cricketer. Mr Wild gives us exquisite details of Ranji's achievements in the game—three centuries in one day at Cambridge, three thousand runs in the greatest of his years, the year 1899. Ranji created a new style; he was the first to make 'every ball into a ball to be hit hard.' 'What would you do with a googly?' they asked. 'I should watch the seams of the ball,' he said. Ranji's final appearance at the wicket was in 1920 in England. Some years previous to that he had lost an eye in an accident and to the day of his death on April 2, 1933 he remained very sensitive about it.

Mr Wild has written an exceedingly interesting biography; to the cricketer and prince of a state, his tribute is just and sympathetic.

Mr Roger Fry

MR ROGER FRY, artist and a great art critic, died on September 9, at the age of sixty-seven, in a London hospital. He was educated at Clifton College and later entered the King's College, Cambridge, and gained a double first in Natural Sciences. He soon abandoned science for art and the "Post-Impressionist" exhibitions that he organised in London before the War aroused widespread interest and controversy. In 1933 Mr Fry became Slade Professor of Fine Art at Cambridge; at one time he held the position of Curator at the Metropolitan Museum, New York.

"*Little Dorrit*"

CHARLES DICKENS is very popular in Germany. One of the studios in that country has picturised *Little Dorrit*. What would Herr Hitler think of it!

Sherlock Holmes

TO dislike Sherlock Homes is to dislike Intellect. The late Lord Brikenhead though an intellectual did dislike this greatest creation in detective fiction. Not Conan Doyle's fault. The halo round Holmes is steady and bright, and all paths of detection lead to Baker Street. In *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* (Ivor Nicholson and Watson 8s. 6d.), Mr Vincent Starrett makes interesting speculations. But often his imagination is keyed high and the results he arrives at are alarming. For instance, Holmes and Dr Watson starting life as Sheringford Holmes and Osmond Sacker.

In the *British Medical Journal* for August 11, 1934, "R. I. G." gives a detailed account of Mr Holmes and Dr Watson. 'When Arthur Conan Doyle was a medical student at Edinburgh in the late 'seventies,' he writes, 'he came under the influence of Joseph Bell, surgeon to the Royal infirmary, whose gift of quick perception and rapid reasoning from small observations he turned to good account later. In 1886, when practising obscurely at Southsea, Conan Doyle hit on the idea of an amateur detective who should apply the methods of Joseph Bell to the unravelling of mysteries, with a sort of medical Boswell as foil and showman.

Thus arose Mr Sherlock Holmes, Dr Watson, and *A Study in Scarlet.* Conan Doyle then came to London in the hope of making a name in opthalmology, but no patients knocked at the door of the house in Montagu Street, Portman Square, and he filled his time by writing further adventures of Sherlock Holmes for the *Strand Magazine.* Now, forty-eight years after his creation, and four years after the death of his creator, Sherlock Holmes, with the lovable but absurd. Watson, has passed into the realm of historical figures; in the minds of millions of people they are far more real than many of their living acquaintances. "His methods, his life, the documents in which his career is related, his friend and biographer, Dr Watson have all been investigated and made the topic of mock-scientific hypotheses." . . Appropriately enough, in view of all the circumstances—Joseph Bell and Conan Doyle were medical graduates of Edinburgh, John H. Watson had been a house-surgeon at Bart's and met Sherlock Holmes there—the company included two members of the medical profession.'

In the same Journal for August 25, in the Correspondence Section and under the caption "Origins of Sherlock Holmes," one W. J. Young holds that the statement, 'when practising at Southsea etc.' is fictitious. 'When a student at Liverpool,' he says, 'in the late 'nineties I read a paper on Sherlock Holmes to the Students' Debating Society. The Chairman on that occasion was George Hamilton, Assistant Honorary Surgeon to Mitchell Banks, and he took the opportunity thus afforded to tell us of his own acquaintance with Doyle, when both were students at Edinburgh. He told us that *at that time* Conan Doyle, deeply interested in Poe's detective works, but recognising that they were "caviare to the general", told Hamilton that he had the idea of writing detective fiction according to the system of Poe, but greatly simplified and brought down to the level of ordinary people. I do not think that this fact has previously been published. After Poe, what poor stuff Doyle's is! As Blatchford expressed it, long ago: "There was enough genius in Poe's little finger to make a score of Conan Doyles".'

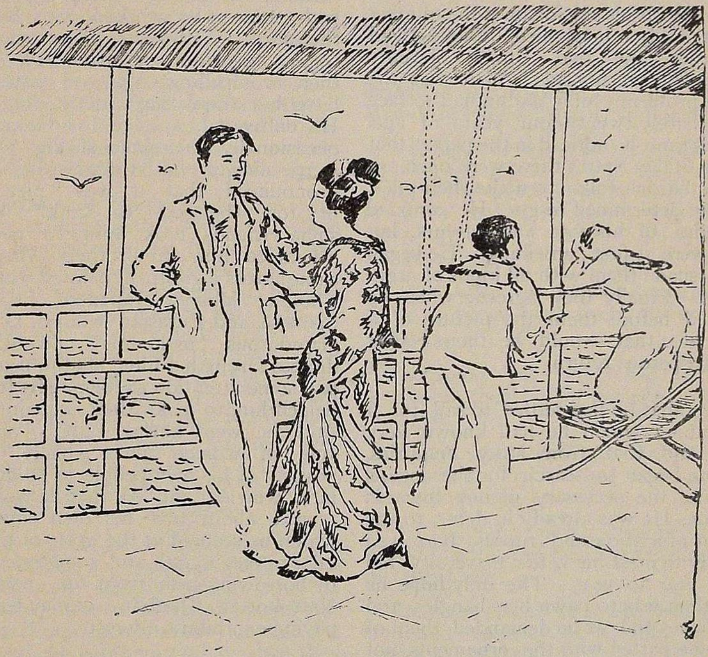
There is a Sherlock Holmes Society in England and it is interesting to note that there is a member of it in Pondicherry, T. S. Blakeney by name. Sounds Pimpernelian!

For my part I am not much interested in the flesh-and-blood-speculations about Holmes; I delight to live with him and dear old Watson, the splendid characters in fiction that they are—lingeringly in the longer stories and intimately from *The Scandal in Bohemia* through forty and odd stories up to *His Last Bow.*

A NOBLE MISTRESS

By NILKAN A. PERUMAL

LOOKING back to a hot summer day in 1927, the picture of one of the saddest leave-takings I have ever seen, comes to mind. It was aboard a liner bound for India, moored alongside the wharf in the port of Penang. On the upper deck stood a tall, slim, brown complexioned Indian with sunken red eyes, and attired in a white drill suit. He was facing a Japanese woman, pretty, small-built,in her prime of life, and dressed in a colourful kimono. Her right hand wiped the tears that dripped down from his eyes. He stood motionless like a statue, uttering not a word; grief choked all utterance. His eyes seemed to do all the talking to her. Then suddenly the steamer whistled, signalling time for departure, as the volume of smoke that emerged from the black funnel increased. Now the pair solemnly bowed to each other, and the woman went down the gangway. The Indian stood on the deck unmoved, staring at her. He turned back, only after she had vanished from his sight.



'*He stood motionless like a statue.*'

Behind this touching scene lay one of the strangest dramas in which Madhu,

an Indian, and Yoshiko, his devoted Japanese mistress played their part; a drama full of colour and sorrow, pleasure and pain, enacted in a little town in the Malay Peninsula.

The story of Madhu in Malaya reveals a very peculiar experience that ever befell an Indian in the peninsula. He was a Madrasee Tamil and was one of those graduates of the Madras University. Starting life as a clerk on twenty rupees a month in a commercial · firm, he found it difficult to maintain his aged parents and young wife. With his misfortunes the number of his children multiplied. They arrived in order—one, two, three. Twenty rupees and seven souls! That was the grave problem which Madhu had to face when barely twenty-four years of age. At this time, he noticed in the papers that in the Malay States there were openings for ambitious folks to make their piles. Madhu determined to go. He confided the idea to his wife and parents, but they were at first unwilling. He began to persuade them with all kinds of arguments. Finally they agreed, when he painted before them the picture of a rosy life that would be theirs after his prosperous return.

Now that he had settled to sail for a land about which he had known very little and that from stray enquiries, Madhu began to search for the means to raise the necessary money towards passage. He was already in debts, to the extent of a thousand rupees, borrowed mostly to meet his wife's maternity bill from year to year. The only hope he had then was to pawn her bangles and necklace and as he demanded them of her, she parted with the ornaments, not without protests and tears. Madhu bade goodbye to his folks and sailed.

Malaya was then a country of great possibilities. Even fools could make their fortunes there and in fact many did. Rubber was selling well and the prosperity of the land became proverbial. There, poverty was unknown. The abundance of wealth made its people take life easy. In such an El dorado, Madhu found himself searching for a job, with the pure motive of helping his family and himself to lead a tolerably comfortable life. The gods being kind, he secured a clerkship, in one of the Governmental departments at Ipoh, with an attractive salary of seventy-five dollars a month. He lived a good life, sent home some money regularly, and received affectionate letters from his wife. He remained an ideal husband, and a dutiful son to his parents.

Soon, he got into company, mostly with those who worked with him at the office. With them, he occasionally began to enter a bar and upon their compelling him, to taste the bitter but stimulating varieties of liquors. He cultivated a taste for them and occasionally when some strong "stuff" went down his throat, he even pronounced that it was "nice and fit for the gods to drink." While some friends took him to taverns, others led him to brothels where he came across a group of "painted women." Chinese, Malays, Japanese, Javanese, Siamese, and Eurasian women, in their glamourous "make-ups" and colourful dresses fascinated him. Madhu began to pay some attention to them. His friends helped him to make their acquaintance. And he went ahead rapidly on the tide of women and whisky. The poverty of his own people in Madras no more worried him. All that he was concerned about was his own comforts, which he secured at the cost of his full salary every month and sometimes even by borrowing cash from the shark-like Nattukottai Chettiar money-lenders, paying exorbitant interest.

While he was thus fast sinking into the pool of debauchery, he came across Yoshiko, who was an inmate of a brothel. With her he developed an intimate connection. Upon her advice he set up a home. Madhu was to pay her fifty dollars a month to run the house. She should not ask him for any more money and could have no control over his ways. The woman agreed. But he soon realized that he was not right in

wronging a woman who took so much interest in his personal welfare. Wisdom from the heavens seemed to descend on him now. The devotion of his mistress turned him into an orderly human being, as he was in his own native Madras.

Yoshiko did not come to Madhu to ruin him by extracting all his earnings like the other "sisters of sorrow". On the other hand, she felt sympathy for the young man who was squandering his health and money. Out of the fifty dollars he gave her every month, she spent only thirty to keep the home going and saved the rest. She did the washing herself, ironed the clothes with the help of the electric presser, did the daily marketing, cooked the food and entertained visitors who sometimes came to see Madhu. She was thus an ideal mistress and her ways pleased him immensely.

Six years of Madhu's life was thus spent gloriously with Yoshiko. All these years he neglected his family in India. Then one day he received a letter from his wife. On reading it, he was moved. He remembered his days in Madras, the poverty and pitiable circumstances of his folks. His present life, though happy, appeared to him, not all too perfect. He wanted to join his family in Madras. But then the thought of deserting his devoted Japanese mistress worried him. He was in a dilemma. 'What is my duty?' he asked himself repeatedly, but found no answer.

That evening he returned home from office earlier than usual, changed his clothes, and directly went into the bedroom where he stretched himself on a sofa. Some people take alcohol for pleasure, while others take it when they are in distress, seeking solace. To Madhu, the contents of his wife's letter was enough to plunge him deep in sorrow. So he began to help himself with several dozes of the yellow-coloured whisky, which he mixed with sparkling soda water before drinking.

Yoshiko who had been out marketing returned with a basketful of fruits and vegetables. Entering the bedroom, she saw Madhu on the sofa and smiled, but when she was just to part her lips to speak, she noticed tears in his eyes. She went near him, took her handkerchief and wiped his tears, casting a serious look at him the while. Then she asked him to tell her what was wrong.

Madhu lifted his head, looked into his mistress's eyes with tender affection, and then burst into bitter tears resting his head on her bosom.

'Nothing much,' he said in a quivering tone, and as he said this he took another glance at the piece of paper that lay on the table.

Yoshiko took hold of the paper, looked at it carefully and then asked Madhu to tell her what it contained.

'Darling,' she said, 'please tell me why you are so depressed. In all our six years of life together you never appeared to be so moved as you are to-day. I guess it must be a terrible affair. Pray, tell me all about it,' she went on.

'This paper,' said Madhu, touching a tip of it, 'is a letter from my wife in India. . .'

Yoshiko's eyes brightened. There was fire in them. Her facial expression changed.

'What, your wife?' she said taking a long breath, 'but darling, you said to me you never had one!'

'I have, but I never thought things would come so far,' he rejoined in a tone of repentance.

Yoshiko listened with the keen attention and curiosity of a child. Madhu continued his talk.

'When I came to Malaya ten years ago, I came leaving behind my wife and three children. Now she writes to say that unless I am back home within a month she would commit suicide.'

As he said this, he began to sob bitterly. Yoshiko was moved. She felt sorry for Madhu, but wondered why he had told her he was a bachelor!

Night was now falling and Ipoh's lights began to blaze. There, in Madhu's house, it was utterly dark, for neither he nor Yoshiko moved from the sofa even to switch on the lights. They talked on.

'That letter from India is worrying me so much,' he continued. 'I do not like to part from you, but my wife and children who have not seen me for the last ten years are anxious to see me. I want you. I want my folks in India. Will you come away with me?' he asked.

Yoshiko sat quiet for sometime. She was speechless, but her two bright eyes kept on looking at her man in a thoughtful mood.

'Yoshiko!' cried Madhu, stretching out his hands towards her. 'I am talking to you, won't you answer me?'

'Yes,' she said slowly, 'I do understand. But I am thinking how to settle matters. I have been thinking over it all along now. I too have my people in Japan and am anxious to see them, but you have been so good to me, that I never felt like deserting you at any time in my life. I loved you and thought we could make a small world, all our own, till death did part us. Now it's all different, you know.'

Madhu put his hands around her neck and pressed his lips on hers before speaking again.

'Yoshiko dear,' he went on, 'I never meant to leave you alone. You know for the last few years we have lived so well and happily, and never for a moment the thought of my folks in India haunted me. And now . . . you understand? don't you?'

'I do,' said Yoshiko in a mood of resignation and continued: 'That is why I am thinking over a solution to the question before us.'

'And how?' asked Madhu eagerly, looking at his beloved with eager eyes.

'Well,' proceeded Yoshiko after a pause, raising her eyebrows, 'I think you must go away from this country and I will sail for Japan. No more Malaya for us. Here we met, we two, and lived happily for sometime, but here we are, two of us, ready to part. What do you say?'

Madhu did not speak. He expected Yoshiko to continue the talk.

'Answer me, please,' Yoshiko demanded of him, but he had no answer to give.

'I am at your mercy,' he went on a little later. 'Say what you like and I will take your advice,' he added shedding a drop of tear which Yoshiko promptly wiped with the arm-end of her kimono.

'In that case, I tell you to resign your job as early as you can.'

'Why resign? Can't you permit me to go home on leave and then come back?'

'No', she said sternly. 'Once you leave Malaya, you leave it for good. So will I do.'

'What is the idea?' Madhu persisted.

'Well, there is no use of your coming back here after I am gone. If you do, you will go the way you went before we set up this home. I hate to see you ruin yourself again. That is why I ask you to go and never come back here,' she said.

'But how am I to go home penniless?' Mahdu asked thoughtfully.

'When I ask you to do a thing, dear, I am asking you in a way that will square up matters smoothly,' she added. 'I had with me ten thousand dollars when I came to live with you and that money is still in the Bank. And during the last six years, savings from the money you gave me to run our home have amounted to about four thousand dollars. Thus the total stands at fourteen thousand. This amount is yours and mine. You take seven thousand and the rest I take with me and go away to Japan. You must first of all go to India, promising me that you will never set foot on this soil once again.'

Madhu sighed. Yoshiko's financial position was a revelation to him. He was lost in thought for a while. His face showed the surprise he felt on knowing that his mistress was the possessor of so many thousands of dollars.

'Fourteen thousand dollars you have! My God, why on earth did you not tell me all about it before?' he exclaimed.

'There was no occasion to tell it,' she replied.

'Well,' continued Yoshiko, 'if you go away to India with seven thousand dollars you could be as happy as a king, can't you? I wish you the best of time with your family. I too will be happy with my folks in Japan, but believe me, I would have been happier with you were you to stay here all along. . .'

Here Yoshiko broke down in her words and clasped Madhu in a tight embrace.

Touched by her words, he kissed her passionately, overflowing with love and affection for the woman who had rescued him from a drunkard's hell to a perfect house-holder's paradise.

Madhu agreed to her proposition, though with reluctance. He decided to go away to India with the seven thousand. Next day, he sent in his resignation to the office, but he, having put in ten years of service, was allowed to retire on a small pension. He was very happy. If he had anything to feel sorry for it was the thought of leaving behind Yoshiko, who had won his deep affection by her admirable qualities.

Then came the day of Madhu's departure for India. With his sailing for home after ten years of life abroad, an important chapter in his book of life came to an end. Another began only after he arrived in Madras.

Laugh, and the World laughs with you!

Most men call a spade a spade—until they get a garden.

*

An active verb shows action as he kissed her and a passive verb shows passion as she kissed him.

*

Equinoxes are the people who live in Greenland.

*

Some men electrify their audiences; others only gas them.

*

The road to success is filled with women pushing their husbands along.

*

Where singleness is bliss it is folly to have wives.

*

Love is an ocean of emotion entirely surrounded by expenses.

REVELATION

By "STORTLER"

THE old man whispered something in his companion's ear. Her face darkened at his words. Ardently he drew her to his side and stroked her hair with his scaly hand—that was the way he always expressed his mute affection.

They. stood on the moonlit terrace of his house. A study in contrasts—that was how they struck you as you first set eyes on them. The man, a dark, shrivelled remnant of an older generation; his companion, a young woman of twenty-five, fair and robust, gorgeously decked with heavy gold ornaments. Conjecture would have called them father and daughter; fact had them as man and wife.

'You have got all that you want,' the old man said coaxingly, 'beauty, wealth, a good husband, no worries. Only one thing is lacking. A little baby at your breast—don't you think that will complete the picture?'

He was repeating his wish for the hundredth time. Not a day passed but he repeated it. Soorappa Chettiar believed that his married life was perfect—but for one thing. They had no child. The absence of a son and heir had made a big void in his heart. He prayed to the gods, observed fasts and feasts, did all in his power to move an obstinate destiny. But that destiny remained immutable; the son and heir showed no sign of turning up. And through the livelong day, he merely recited his fond wishes to his wife, little knowing that an identical desire was gnawing at her feminine bosom.

She heard him shyly, without a word or gesture. She liked the old man, her husband, in spite of his coarseness, in spite of his senility. He was so kind to her, so officious to do anything to please her. She liked him; but it was as she liked the little dog in the yard which wagged its tail and curled its ears whenever it saw her.

'I am certain the Lord will help us.'

She knew he was coming round to his old proposal.

'Something tells me He will. This year you must not fail. This is the auspicious month, you must visit the Tiru—temple. I have prayed to the Lord day and night; He never lets down his devotees. You know I cannot do anything else.'

He looked pitiable as he said all that, acknowledging his incapacity. Subhadra looked at him from under her dark brows. He was standing with his dinted face turned to the moon, the wrinkles standing out clear against his profile, his bald head appearing like a cucumber. He seemed so miserable, so far away, lonely, miserable.

'Won't you go, my darling?'

She felt it would be monstrous to deny him anything now.

'I shall,' she replied, trembling at herself.

The auspicious day came in due course, as auspicious days ever have done and ever will do. Auspicious days are ordained by man, and whatever is ordained by man moves with a clockwork punctuality. More important than the arrival of the auspicious day itself was that of the Elder from the Tiru—temple. He was a little old man, this deputy and chief agent of a very powerful god. Ever smiling and cheerful and ever a favourite with the women and the kids. He could tell stories of gods and ghosts, crack vulgar jokes and make everybody laugh.

Early in the afternoon they took her to the temple. They made a small party, consisting, besides Subhadra, of the Elder, a cousin of the Chettiar's, and a man-servant. The bullock cart made a record in country speed—doing the forty-mile journey in seven hours. With the

advance of the evening and the thickening of darkness they reached the temple.

As they turned round the last corner of their circuitous path they came in full sight of the temple. Subhadra gazed at the ancient pile with awe and wonder. It looked so gigantic, so intricate—and, in the uncertain light of early night, so beautiful. Rearing its steep pagoda high into the air, with its massive granite pillars and fantastic carvings, lit ablaze with lamps set in a thousand niches, it certainly was a wonder. Subhadra watched the lamps and the carvings, the men and women gliding in and out noiselessly, like phantoms; she very nearly forgot all about the god.

The Elder explained to her the significance of the carvings on the walls. He pointed out to her the gods and goddesses making immodest love to one another, the chariots and horses, the bulls and peacocks, and gave her their denominations. He did it all in such a confusing, disconnected way that at the end of each narrative, his listener was no wiser than at the commencement.

She liked the old simpleton—perhaps for the childish innocence that marked his talk and manner, perhaps for his transparent stupidity. She felt that he was her friend, her servant ; and she talked to him without reserve.

They alighted at the temple gate. The Chettiar's cousin, on whom the most violent sensation always acted as a soporific, went in, found a convenient pial within the temple, spread his shawl and slept for twelve hours. As for the man-servant, the first thing he did was to fish out the nearest tavern and get himself drunk. So that Subhadra was left in the company of the Elder, already her friend and companion.

He took her to the shrine where the evening-worship was going on steadily amidst the howl of the pipe and the cacophonous clatter of human tongues. He left her in front of the monstrously-garlanded deity. She prayed to the round-eyed, expressionless divinity with folded hands. Ignorant of studied rhymes (the favourite dishes of gods and goddesses), she merely put forth the simple pangs of her unrealized motherhood. Long she prayed and earnestly. The night advanced, the devotees left the shrine in pairs and threes, the lights went out one by one. Still she stood before the image and prayed.

She felt weak and faint. The stink of smoke and burnt oil made her head ache. The odoriferous exhalations from the incense and jasmine wreaths gave her a strange giddiness. One by one, things grew blurred before her vision. The thousand oil lamps fused into an illuminated whole. The grim, granite pillars evaporated into something huge, colossal. The gods and goddesses making immodest love on the walls, the chariots and dragons, detached themselves from their shadowy background and sprang into hideous activity. But the sensation was momentary. Soon she shook off the macabre dreaminess and looked about her.

Then she saw something live, human. A short distance from her, a dark, thick-set man of middle age was moving about the precincts like a shadow. He brushed past her and she had a closer view of him and his abdominal mound. A big, black man with a half-shaven head, a vacant face, and a pair of frightful eyes.

Those eyes! She shuddered as she saw them first—involuntarily,she loathed them the next instant. They were small, twinkling, sinister eyes with a drunken bronze light in them—shining like metal at dull red heat; they followed you wherever you turned to, they devoured you with a single flash of their evil pupils and made your flesh creep!

They made *her* flesh creep. She felt her legs tottering beneath her, her breath going out of her. A horrid, undefined feeling of fear gripped her by the heart.

The man went away—but his evil eyes followed her long after he had gone. A strange dimness, a fierce thirst, took possession of her being.

'Child, why is it you have gone so pale?'

She knew the benign voice. She turned and saw the kindly Elder, bending over her.

'I am very thirsty and I have got a terrible headache.'

'Poor child, the strain is too much for your nerves. Come with me, you shall have something to drink.'

He took her to a hut adjoining the temple—he told her it was where he lived. He bade her sit on a broken bench. . Then he called out to someone outside

It was the dark man with the bronze eyes that answered his call.

'Suppa, get some water. The *amma* is feeling unwell.

The *amma* never saw the villanous wink with which the old man followed his order—or her fate might have been different.

The man went out and returned with a tumblerful of " water ". She drank it, it didn't taste like water—she was too thirsty to take note of the fact—it tasted nice, delicious. In five minutes she felt refreshed ; her fears and fatigue vanished altogether. They gave her a second tumblerful. She drank it with delight. Slowly, the vicious liquor worked on her. She felt an immodest desire to laugh and sing. Her senses began to reel in a delicious dance. The little room with its dubious earthen lamp, the Elder, the man with the bronze eyes—and herself went clean out of her mind.

They plied her with the liquid. Mechanically, and without knowing what she was doing, she drained glass after glass. She laughed and sang. She shuffled with her clothes and danced. Then she felt her senses numbing, her limbs relaxing, a kind of torpor stealing over her. She staggered to a bed and slept . .

In the dreadful silence of midnight, she stirred in her bed and groaned.

She rose as out of a revolution. The night sat upon her like a nightmare—the night that was to cast its powerful,malignant shadow over her subsequent existence. She only felt it in her whole being. A dead weight lay huddled in her brain and was a stumbling-block to thinking. Something monstrous, gigantic, something too big to be understood, had happened ; that was all she knew, or that was all she felt. The atom darkness had taken shape and danced a ghostly death-dance on her couch. Or the earth had burst and thrown out its gruesome bowels for a moment. Or a mist had come on the wings of a whirlwind and enveloped earth and sky, the whole Universe, in a shapeless oblivion. She could not tell what had happened. Only it was tremendous, huge, hideous ; and it had made her a stranger to herself and to all mankind.

The bullock cart took her home late in the afternoon. And it took the vapourous weight in her brain along with her. All through the six-hour struggle in the cart, amidst the jerking and jolting, the creaking and sputtering of the wheels as the conveyance negotiated particularly uneven ground, Subhadra sat silent as a rock. She stared intently ahead of her and saw nothing. The wayside trees with their summer foliage, the brown, barren *maidans* freckled with cattle, the ploughmen's huts and the paddy-fields dissolved and sank before her eyes ; and in their stead, arose a mist, mighty, mysterious, and monstrous in its nebulousness. She watched for a tiny rent in the universal haze, for the least ray of light through the formless screen. But it never came. And she sat crammed in a corner of the cart, deaf to the unceasing cackle of her husband's cousin, blind to the whole of creation and with the glassy look of one trying to solve a mystery.

It was the same when she reached home. The shadow of that terrible night persisted. Those forty-eight hours had brought about a change permanent and irradicable. A melancholy muteness became part of her life. Night and day, and day after day, she shut herself up in her room upstairs and sat at her

window, all alone, looking idly into the street and trying to shake off the shadow of her life. She talked little—and, that out of unavoidable necessity, to the servants or her husband. When there were visitors she came and sat in their midst like a mummy. She answered questions with nods of the head or gestures of the hand. Her smile became a contortion and her laugh a hyena-cry. It seemed as if the fair-faced Subhadra whose presence had lighted up the cheerless cells of her husband's home and who had scattered sunshine and flowers wherever she had trodden was gone from the world altogether ; and, in her stead, a pale, pathetic ghost, whose lips never moved and whose eyes glared like shrill pebbles, inhabited Soorappa Chettiar's household.

Soorappa Chettiar noticed the change. At first he attributed it to weariness and tried to console himself. But as the days went by and the change continued, he became alarmed. Once he questioned her about her morbid depression.

'What is the matter with me ? why, nothing. I am perfectly well,' she replied and laughed one of her absurd laughs.

That set his fears at rest. He was one of those men of adjustable temperament who place their hopes in a blind to-morrow and derive a self-deceiving consolation out of that shadowy to-morrow. He was, in fact, an optimist. And true to his philosophy, he went on hoping that things would come round to-morrow, the day after, in a month, a year. This continual hoping took on sometimes the semblance of actual fact and greatly diminished his distress.

In one thing, at least, his hope was not unrewarded. He had firmly held that the gods would give him a son. And they did. He knew how to deal with them. Pilgrimages, feasts, cocoanuts--these were the secrets of the trade. It was by one of these he cajoled them ; and he got what he wanted—a son.

How he rejoiced over this last addition to the human species and prospective heir to his money-bags, it is unnecessary to describe. His soul and his rice-stores were insured against evil—and he was glad. But his joy was not unsullied. The birth of a son had a decidedly disastrous effect on his wife. Instead of alleviating it only aggravated her listlessness. She became a prey to fits and there were times when forgetful of her food, her clothes or her baby, she sat dumb for hours together trying vainly to force something on her recollection. That dogged something puzzled her more than ever. It avoided her grasp with tantalizing dexterity and made a wretch of her. Add to it all the physical anguish of an already impaired constitution, and the fatigue of an overtaxed brain, the wretchedness was complete.

They stood again on the terrace as they had done eighteen months ago. To Subhadra it seemed as if eternity had interposed between her former self and the fanciful wretch she was now. It was evening and the stifling heat of the midsummer noon had given place to a cool southern breeze. Soorappa Chettiar had come up in the hope that the fresh air would do his wife some good. They stood a little apart from each other, while the baby, a dark, plump, ugly, Glaxo-fed monstrosity of ten months, tottered about on his infant feet and toyed with a walking-stick.

'Did I not say the Lord would help us ?' the old man said, his whole person beaming with satisfaction.

Subhadra was silent. She always was, nowadays. She stood gazing stupidly at the smoker of a house near by.

'See what a pretty fellow he is ! Of course, he has my complexion. . . .'

She was not listening but looking away to where, in the distance, a clump of *neem* trees nodded in the wind.

The child blundered to their side. The old man took him up in his arms and began fondling him ; whereat the little fellow began to kick lustily at his chest.

'See what he does, the little rogue. Is he not a dear ? He is . . . .'

The mother was still dumb.

'See now, he is turning to you. He wants you to take him in your arms.'

Subhadra turned round with a sigh—as if she had just risen out of an age-long slumber.

Then, of a sudden, as she fixed her eyes on her child struggling to reach her arms, she went white and turned into a ghost. Her eyes lost the final vestige of the human in them, they became spectral, hideous; her face assumed an expression, horrid, cadaverous, unbearable to behold; her teeth chattered and her whole body shook in an unearthly convulsion. The cloud that had gathered fury till now poured out its vicious contents with a terrific explosion.

'Those eyes!' she cried frantic, mad,—in a voice ghostly and frightful.

The working of the human brain is mysterious, surpassing our puny comprehension. Characters and incidents which, we believe, are gone from our memories altogether, or of which we had but the slightest and most transient knowledge, such as the experiences of a dream or a coma, are stored up in the depths of our remembrance and spring into life when we expect them least. For the revivification of these facts, however, some kind of catalyst is essential. This catalyst is mostly something insignificant, a circumstance of little intrinsic worth, such as a single happening in a train of events, a look of a face or a gesture of a hand. When this single circumstance has been recalled, the whole train of precedent and subsequent circumstances comes back with crystal clearness. And the chain is complete, solid. This was the case with Subhadra. Ever since the ill-fated night at the Tiru—temple, she had felt that something had happened. She had tried her best to find out that something, but she had failed. For eighteen months that something had worried her day and night and turned into a kind of elusive mist that drove her to desperation. But now, unexpectedly and with overwhelming force, the revelation came.

And it came in those eyes, those bronze eyes which shone out of the plump, babyface like metal at dull red heat; eyes with a sinister light in them and detestable even in their infant setting.

An immense horde of facts came tumbling upon one another into her mind. The night that had sat upon her like a nightmare, opened out its horrid vista of wretched realities. The lurid temple lights, the temple Elder with his vicious smile, the hut near the temple, the "water"—and, above all, the dark man with the bronze eyes came back to her recollection. For the first and final time in her life, the black tragedy of that infernal midnight appeared to her in its naked hideousness. For a moment—that was all. Her heart could not bear the rushing tide of filthy revelations. It staggered beneath the weight, staggered, collapsed and fell.

She went mad.

Rushing forward with maniacal vehemence, she snatched the child by one arm, and, ere even the poor infant could grasp the fate that awaited it, ere even the fond father could raise his hand in defence of the loved one, she had throttled it with her iron hands and choked the breath out of the infant heart.

Twelve months later she died in the mental hospital, hanging herself in one of her virulent fits.

LOVE IS BEST

By ABE

'DOCTOR'S orders, madam!'

'Oh' do please let me in.'

There was intense suffering in the tone, agony on the face, irresistible appeal in the eyes.

The nurse moved a little from the doorway to a side. She was an old woman well in her fifties and as she regarded the tall white-saried young lady, not more than a girl, who was so intent on her purpose, a touch of motherly tenderness made her heart flow toward this young creature in her suffering.

'Hm,' she grunted. And then: 'You can't stay long, it's the doctor's time. High tempered—his orders are orders. But you may just take a look. It isn't likely to do you any good—and mind, just a few minutes—don't disturb him!'

The girl cast a long and severe look to say she knew more than that—cared too much, and gently opened the door.

A puff of medicine-smelling air touched her face. There was the unmistakable smell of tincture and a faint whiff of chloroform. The room was spacious, well-lighted, ventilated, and tastefully decorated. On the wall opposite her was a picture of the goddess Sarasvati, hung over with paper garlands, just above a large doorway, now thickly curtained. On the rightside wall was a glasspaned window opening on to a garden; a rosebud even peeped in between the bars. Above the window was another picture, this one of Lakshmi, and looking round, she saw one such on each wall along the same line. But the look round was only casual, disinterested. Toward her left, immediately below a halfclosed window was a bandaged head showing out of the folds of bed-coverings and blankets. It was only a patch of uncovered black hair that marked where the head lay in that homogeneous whiteness of sheets and bandages. With slow, silent steps, afraid even to stir the air, she walked to this spot and stood gazing at the closed eyelids and soft heaving bosom. From a post of the cot hung a chart and she read: 'Delirium. . . . temp. 105°.' She sank in the chair by the cot and with hand-propped chin looked intently at the handsome face now crossed by a thick lint of line, cotton and cloth; even through the thickness a trickle of blood showed outside.

Long and intently she looked, while tears filled her eyes. She raised her hands to heaven and prayed.

'He can save him—perhaps He alone!'

She turned round and saw the nurse by her side; silent tears ran down her cheeks.

'And you will be kind to him? will not secretly curse him?' she murmured.

'Poor boy, he has enough without that. Such a figure! Pity if the world should lose him! Wonder why the youngsters have gone crazy about speed as though they want to do the whole world in one life; and making it even shorter thus. There are too many deaths these days, barring such. A great pity, indeed!—But hush, do not talk. He must wake up fresh and calm, undisturbed.'

She moved to the medicine-shelf and mechanically shook a bottle. 'Two more, one soon after he awakes—Madam, the doctor will be here soon and it wouldn't be for my good to see you here. What temper these youngsters have! Dear, dear! you are crying and who wouldn't, seeing a flower fading; not a girl like you. I can tell the type at a glance—you wouldn't see a fly hurt! And such a young man! you are his—'

'Friend.'

And she fled as though from punishment!

* * * *

'W—a—ter!'

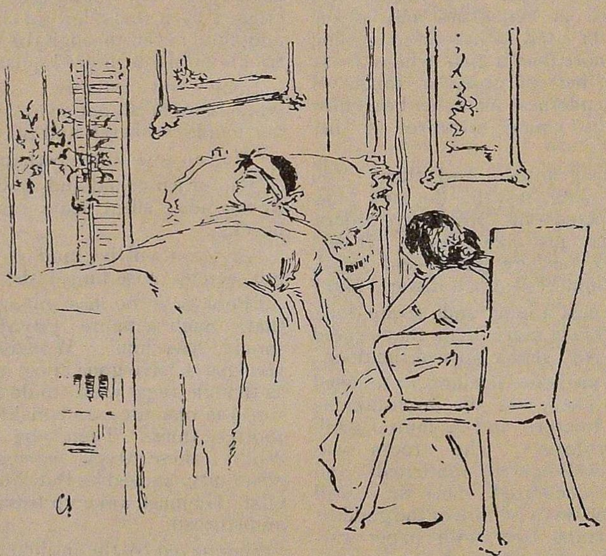
The nurse poured an ounce of some liquid through the halfparted lips. The patient painfully swallowed it, smacked his lips, turned over on his left side, again lay flat on his back, breathing heavily, tired with the effort.

A crash—some pain on the head—a sudden sense of giddiness, of the world moving too rapidly to get the hold on—then darkness—and pain again—a cosy room, silently moving figures, same queer liquid poured between the lips—again darkness!

Something again was swallowed. He tossed his head on the pillow and then rested it in a comfortable position.

'The wound will heal—some heavy blow—it's the brain,' and the doctor moved his hand to his head. 'It is now two days he is in a state of delirium—he mutters something one can't make out. Seems to me a disappointment,' and he significantly moved the hand to his heart.

Ah, yes! an appointment. Where? Where? When? With—With?—And then—a rushing car, a reckless youth



'She sank in the chair.'

at the wheel, flashing light, persistent hoot of a motor horn, undecisive dodging—crash!

With dexterous ease, the old nurse tucked some sheets here, pulled out some sheets there, placed a pillow on the side, moved the legs, shifted the head. 'Better,' murmured the patient.

Satish opened his eyes. Both the doctor and the nurse were there. They looked at each other and then at the patient to verify what had been said in the looks. The doctor felt his pulse. 'High fever. Must pass a good night. Give one dose.'

It invariably ended there; once began Satish tried to remember.

Crash!—He must have slept long, he was tired. He was in a room now. Last time he remembered he was in a car. Where was it? Who brought him here? The room was oddly familiar. Was he living or dead? Living, certainly. There were two human beings and his

head was paining. He moved his hand to it. What was that ?—Again that overpowering sleep. Doctor—nurse—paining head.

* * * *

'This night, miss, this night, everything depends upon his sleeping soundly to-night—that's what the doctor says. If he doesn't, God have mercy on him !'

The girl raised a pair of tearladen eyes from the patient to the nurse; and perhaps realising that nothing lay in her power, lifted them heavenwards.

A chill wind seemed to have set in outside. The curtain on the window trembled and the picture rustled. The nurse opened the bureau by the bedside and took out a neatly folded sheet.

'Do let me cover him,' the girl pleaded, and unfolding it spread it tenderly on the supine figure. With slender fingers she pulled it up to the neck and arranged the end neatly round. For full five minutes she stood looking at that young and handsome face that had no contortions, no disfigurement save the ugly bandage lying athwart the chin and cheek. The lips were set in natural ease, the eyelids lay light as though to let the sparkling eyes see through even in repose. One hand showed out and she put it under the sheet; and it seemed that her hand remained there a trifle too long.

But the nurse did not think much of it. As she regarded this beautiful girl aureoled by sorrow, bending lovingly over the pale, limp figure that lay helpless on the bed, pulling up the sheets, smoothening the folds, adjusting the pillows, she thought of the power of suffering to breed compassion and of the joy that must come of ministering to the ailing.

'How our hearts are moved by the suffering and helplessness of others! It's the motherly instinct, I do think. And what a great pity, the doctor says he will live, but—but, the brain will be affected. There is something on the mind that keeps the fever still high. Lord! think of this young man living with that queer thing gone queerer. He blabbers so much in his delirium,—poor me, can't make out. Yet what could be on his heart ? He is rich and no girl would have jilted him with that face—and a heart to match, I bet. Look at that mouth, those lines on the face—dignity, honour, purity, kindness. But girls are funny, these days, there is no knowing ! And madam, did you hear, they say he rushed purposely on as though wanting the accident and more, that is what he says; the one in the other car, he is improving; and I say with the doctor, he has been disappointed terribly. The—'

'Nurse, nurse! will he improve, oh, do tell me! What does the doctor say ? what do you think ? Tell me he will.'

'I have said what the doctor told me, madam. He is not sure. May, he hopes; so do we all. And with such a charming friend praying, he should.'

'Spare me ! Do I not suffer enough that you should mock me so?' and she sobbed.

'There, there, whoever mocked you? That's a child all over. Do not cry, dear, it will spoil the looks; besides it may disturb him. And even his brain may be cured, if only the cause is known. He may give out something in his delirium—what a blessing even that can be! Now be a good girl, dry your eyes and go home; it's late—and you may come tomorrow though you haven't told me who you are or where you live. What a pair you would make! There, don't look at me like that; an old woman must have her liberties.

* * * *

Two children at play. To school and back, together. A long walk, but never tiresome. Heavy books of two. She was but a child. Her school was on the way. He left her there and fetched her in the evening—what loving care and protection! Innocent prattle, merry tinkling laughter. A handsome boy and a pretty girl on their way to and from school, always laughing, always playful. What attention they attracted, what envy they stirred! They called them husband and wife and ridiculed them. Who cared? They played at keeping house at home, in the evenings and holidays; they were

neighbours. Such young creatures! Then College for him. How he longed for the vacations, to be back home to play with her! They grew; she was a woman, a girl no longer. They couldn't be free as of old. She blushed in his presence; he felt shy in hers. But they longed for each other's company. Stealthy glances, chance encounters not altogether accidental. Afraid each to say what each wanted to—bashful, modest. Days, weeks. Then, the avowal on his part, the admission on hers. It happened in the garden; the families were merry inside; the moon was full, the night air fresh and sweet. The strange restlessness and calm. Murmured promises, dreamy plans. . Back to college. The ever-present vision—lonely, expectant days. Then . . then . . a little temptation. He was ashamed of it. Only momentary—yet a weakness. Again the same memory, the same form in dreams, the same longing for the anxiously awaited date . . . Great expectations. The examination was over and he was back home. An appointment. Endearing talk, caressing looks—what a glorious night! The same garden, the same moon, the more ardent lovers! New oped flowers, mature buds, dewkissed earth! Rippling laughter, love's sweet words! What a perfect world! Then—a little confession in all good intention—and smash——!

Satish's eyes opened and closed again. The same nurse was there with attentive looks.

Smashed into smithereens all his fond dreams! He wanted to keep nothing from her; yet she misunderstood; did not read in the confession the intensity of selfless love that would have no secret from the loved. But she was lost to him, what good in living then!

He begged to be forgiven, invoked by all they had told each other, appealed to her womanly tenderness to overlook that small dot on his otherwise stainless past. After all it was a sin repented for, a sin confessed and so a strength, even. 'Rajam!—Rajam! I love you so. You love me dearly, you are only angry! Do not spurn me, let your anger cool, and let your heart dictate!'

His lips moved and the nurse bent down close to his face.

'Rajam — forgive — life — death—nothing left—good end—.'

The doctor entered noiselessly and took his hand. 'Beats rapidly. Mind is working fast. Made out anything?'

'I could guess it—Rajam—vague enough! Wonder whether he is dead or dying!'

'Yes, madam, that is what the doctor suspects. He does rave a lot. Must have been an accident, he would not have done it wantonly, that I can tell. That is lying on his mind, and with his brain all stirred up and his frame all too weak, he is getting hotter and hotter and so worse and worse. He mustn't think, but he will, with blood lying on his head. If Rajam were but alive and she could see him, well—'

'If anything has happened at all, it can only be an accident. I know him well'—and the girl burst into tears, overcome with the vehemence of the pretest.

'So—' commented the nurse at the end of her own thoughts.

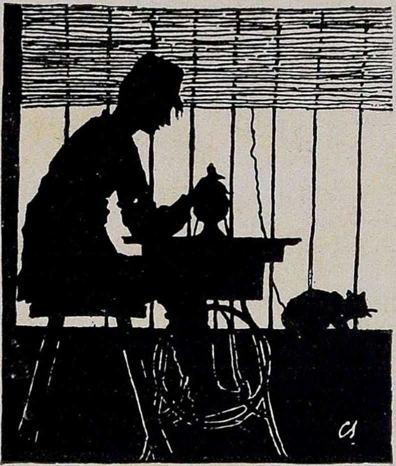
The girl was calm again by the bedside. Her eyes, parched in intense agony, scanned the patient's face and closed as if to reconstruct its beauty from the lineaments of the nose and mouth. Her frame trembled with fear and anxiety. Now and then she moved her hand bedwards, looked over her shoulder and withdrew it. The pale thin lips shaped regular movements as of wordforming but no sound came forth. The tired eyelids exhibited signs of life and she prayed they might open. A ghost of a smile seemed to flit across the face, then a cloud descended, and it was convulsed in pain. A spasm of agony shot up her marrow and with quick impulse she clasped one feverish hand in hers and pressed it close to her heart.

'Satish! Satish—I am here, won't you open your eyes? Your Rajam, waiting for you!'

He opened his eyes and smiled. 'Rajam, you!' His eyes closed in restful slumber; there was a strange calm on his face.

'Madam!' Rajam put a finger to her mouth and said, 'Hush!'

A STORY IN SILHOUETTES



The WAR MEMORIAL

(To M. CHALAPATHI RAU)

By

MANJERI S. ISVARAN

FOR a space of five minutes there was no noise except the whirr of the Singer. The shop was in a quiet nook of the City, a little room in the front of a tenement-house. The tailor was a young mohammedan, in his early twenties; tall and muscular, compact as the machine at which he worked. While he ran the diaphanous piece of cloth under the needle, his sensitive fingers quivered like the antennae of an insect; a bodice beautiful as a dream stole into shape; the young tailor straightened himself on the stool, then leaned against the wall, regarded his work and sighed.

His friend, the Cat, miaowed. It jumped on its master's shoulder, curled its tail, and nuzzled against his neck. The loving caress on the back for which it sat expectant did not come; miaowing again it jumped down, looked back and hurried away.

Nooruddin woke from his deep musing. 'I can't go on any more like this,' he said to himself, 'making a measly eight annas a day. Nobody appreciates good work and a lady of quality, nowadays, knows as much about the art of embroidery as a Kaffir does about a houri. My work is wasted, my youth is wasted, and here I am, finding it hard, damned hard to give a meal a day to my aged parents. Bismilla! I am not a coward. *I shall go*,' he exclaimed, and paused for a while as if listening to his own voice of decision within as to the call of the *muezzin*. Something stirred at his feet; he felt the warmth of fur, looked down and smiled. It was his friend, the Cat.

There were two more hours for nightfall but he put on his fez and closed the shop.

'MY son, you must not go and leave us alone in our old age,' cried Resham-jan and her voice trembled like a leaf wet with rain. 'Mesopotamia! whoever has heard of that country? It must be far, far away, and what kind of people it has, Allah alone knows! And you say men are killing each other there. Oh no, my son, your absence will be our death.' She caught him by his arms and stroked his cheek, straining into his eyes all her soul the while.

Gulam Ali, the father, sat silent. Taking his long beard in his hands he rocked himself; not long before he was a married man he had known and acknowledged the superior wisdom of his wife. Nooruddin was their only son, their darling, their light, their hope. An ancestor of Gulam Ali had served the puissant Nawabs of Arcot; the stars and flowers and tendrils he had woven in the robes of lords and ladies remained undimmed in the art of Gulam Ali—he was an expert embroiderer; he wailed that his brothers took more and more to wearing the Feringhee's clothes; who cared for lungis and pyjamas of exquisite wove and brilliant embroidery?

Now his son was determined on going to Mesopotamia as a tailor in the Army Clothing Department. 'He dreams of making a huge pile, dear boy,' he thought, 'but who will look after us when he is gone?' With his beard in his hands he rocked himself disconsolately.

'Mother, I'll be back soon,' said Nooruddin. 'This is the chance of my life and I can't let it slip. Money that cannot be earned here by hard and honest work in twenty years, can be earned there in two years. I will be back soon, mother dear, and then everyday, *pilao* and *kicheri* for us.'

'Meeah! Meeah!' wailed the aged mother, 'what you earn here is enough to feed us and Allah will surely reward honest work. You are young and innocent, and it is a wicked world.'

But Nooruddin was ten stones of solid resolution. Embracing his parents and uttering the parting word he tore himself away from them. Resham-jan covered her mouth with her veil and sobbed; Gulam Ali's beard was wet and heavy with silent tears.

'Khoda Hafiz! Khoda Hafiz!' they cried after him.

TWO years passed, three. Nooruddin! Nooruddin!—The son had turned into a bodiless cry in the abode of the aged mohammedan and his wife.

Death had been busy in far off Mesopotamia which he had made his high capital; pneumonia raged.

Gulam Ali and Resham-jan prayed for the return of their son.

In a strange country Nooruddin was dead and *burnt*.

Gulam Ali's sight was dimming. His fingers plied the needle in wrong places; the stars and flowers and tendrils sprawled as caricatures. 'Oh, my son, will I see you before I am blind, before I am dead,' he murmured into the soft piece of silk over which he bent and strained.

In a strange country Nooruddin was dead and *burnt*.

'Do I hear my darling's footfalls? Every night he came to me and put into my hands the silver and copper pieces. They were gold. And I watched him eat his food heartily; he seemed Yusuff himself, the bright, the beautiful, to mine eyes. To-morrow, yes, to-morrow, my Nooruddin will come to me,' so monologued the poor mother.

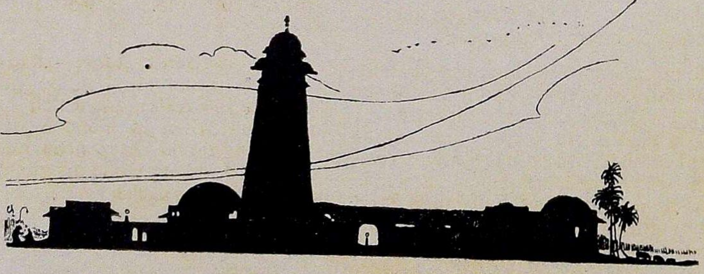
In a strange country Nooruddin was dead and *burnt*.

THE twilight was a twilight of flowerdust. Before, lay the darkening sea, dimpled with a myriad diamond points and fringed by yellow sands ruffled and ribbed by the wind; behind, the Cooum rolled out like a broad black ribbon; and farther beyond, the greensward and the girdle of trees. In the middle rose the stately War Memorial.

Gulam Ali and Resham-jan knew why it stood there. To commemorate those who had fallen in the Field of Honour! Yes, War is a Great Leveller; the army cook and the army launder, the army tailor and the army muleteer, the drummer, the trumpeter, the bugler, and the gallant soldier who is gored by the bayonêt or is burnt by the bullet are all suckled at the breast of Bellona, are all equally dear to her. One may wrestle with Death and die while another will pay his debt to Death; one may have a marble monument while another not even a simple headstone; but when Peace builds the Cenotaph and the martial music plays the paean of a brave memory, the crown of glory shines with imperial lustre on one and all the dead.

The aged pair crossed the rampart and stood before the column. Overhead, the sky had shapes and hues: like a quarry of pearls, like crags of rubies, and like yawning coal mines. The pearls paled, the rubies broke, and the twilight of flowerdust became charged with the black dust from the coal mines.

'My son!—oh, my son!' cried the woman lifting her veil. You died in a strange country, among Feringhees and Kaffirs, and we could not build a tomb for you, light the light, and pray beside your tomb. But Allah has been kind; *He* has given you the tomb and *He* has lighted the lights. Ul—humd-ul-illa!' she exclaimed, tears flowing from her eyes. Her uplifted look had the ecstasy of seeing a Vision; she saw the stately granite column shortening itself and animating into the form of her youthful son. 'Ul—humd-ul-illa!' she cried again. Her husband echoed the praise; and the wind that frolicked with a marine frivolousness stood suddenly still, heard and caught 'Ul-humd-ul-illa!' and whistled it to land and sea, to sea and land, to land, sea, and starry sky.



THE EYE OF THE IDOL

By G. NANJANATH

It was past midnight when Mollison arrived at the temple. Overhead, half-covered by the silver-edged clouds was the waning moon. And the temple stood, partly in light, partly in darkness, a gigantic structure appearing more gigantic by the bare country ground around it. The shadow of a lonely palm tree that stood in front of the temple, falling on the white-washed wall assumed strange shapes every second as its top waved to and fro in the wind.

Joseph Mollison, world-traveller and coming from London, had no sense of romance to come to that mysterious temple on such a night as that. It was a gem in the eye of the idol of the temple that had drawn him there.

As he neared the gateway the terrible form of the image came to his mind. It was a temple of Shiva, he had heard. Shiva, fierce and red, with a skull in one hand and a naked sword in the other, dancing the dance of destructon on a human body! On his forehead, in the socket of his third eye, was an ovalshaped gem, a diamond of the purest ray serene.

Outside, the temple was deserted but for a few stray bulls feeding lazily on the grass. Mollison mounted the much-worn steps and stopped at the main door. He found it locked with an ancient padlock. For a few seconds he examined it with the light of his torch. Ugh! he cried. In his younger days he had cracked many an iron safe.

The next minute the lock was wrenched out and he entered. The torchlight revealed a broad, open courtyard. A hundred feet from where he stood, at the end of an avenue of elegantly carved pillars was the sanctum. The whole place, lighted by the half-moon and deadly still, presented a very weird appearance. For a moment Mollison hesitated. The figure of Shiva was in his mind and he imagined that it was staring at him. But he pulled himself up and boldly walked between the pillars to the sanctum.

Big idols, black with age and oil confronted him as he scanned with his torch around. Again he stopped for a moment hesitating. But he straightened himself and muttering, 'Tut, I am getting nervous,' began minutely examining the lock that secured the door of the shrine.

It was a stronger one than the first but a mere trifle to Mollison. After about fifteen minutes' tackling it yielded. The chains were loosened and the heavy bolts drawn out of their deep sockets.

The first object that Mollison caught sight of was the diamond, dazzling in the light of his torch. Then slowly he perceived the grim form of the image made more terrifying by the shadow cast on the wall. A faint oil lamp was burning in a corner.

With feverish haste Mollison ran to the idol to cut out the gem. With joy he almost forgot himself. A thousand pleasant thoughts crossed his mind. The priceless diamond would be his. He knew a diamond cutter who would make six small diamonds out of this so that he would be able to dispose them off more easily. He would sell all. And then, peace forever and ever. No more banks. No more safes. No more police.

Then the country home he had dreamt of came to his mind. The girl that served in the restaurant which he used to frequent when in London had said Yes. He would keep hens and read books all day long while his girl cooked and mended his socks.

For a second the breath in him went away because he fancied that the idol

turning to his side was staring at him with its two big, blood-red eyes. This stopped his happy thoughts and he began the work for which he had come.

Standing to one side of the image he raised himself on his toes to pluck the gem out of the eye. As he moved his hands over the stone in order to get a firm hold, something sharp pricked him. He suddenly drew back his palm to examine. On the thumb was a tiny puncture of the size of a pin's head. A circle, dark green in colour had already formed around it.

For five minutes Mollison suffered agonies that no words can describe. Then at last with a mad yell and a foaming mouth he fell in a heap at the feet of the idol. The deadly poison that had gone into his blood had done its work.

At daybreak, when the priest and other workers in the temple came to the spot, they saw the body of a whiteman lying at the feet of their God. In one of his hands he was holding an electric torch with the glass broken. His face had turned a greenish black and was distorted hideously indicating the terrible pain he had suffered during the last few minutes of his life.

Money Muddle

A WOMAN who did not understand the language of business went into the Bank of England and, addressing the first official she saw, explained that she wished to consult someone about her War Loan holding.

The clerk to whom she talked happened to be rather a grave person. He enquired: " Is it a case of conversion or redemption, Madam ?"

" Conversion . . . redemption," faltered the woman. " Er . . . . pardon me, is this the Bank of England, or the Church of England ?"

DECEPTION

By CROSS S. DEVASAHAYAM

THE behaviour of Mr Madhusan after he returned from his customary evening walk seemed perfectly strange. He appeared to be a little excited too.

Without speaking a word in reply to his wife's questions, he went straight to the bathroom and became absorbed in cleaning a small piece of stone. As he cleansed it in soapwater and sand-papered it thoroughly the stone glistened, and Mr Madhusan's face brightened up with a strange sort of smile.

'I found this stone in a field,' he explained to his inquisitive wife. 'To all appearance, a precious stone and may fetch us a thousand rupees in sale.'

Mrs Madhusan snatched the stone—she was *that* sort of woman—from her husband's hand and examined it.

'A piece of exquisite china,' she said sarcastically.

'I found this stone in a field,' he explained to his inquisitive wife.

'What!' he exclaimed, 'look at the beautiful *natural* lines in it! Note its colour. It's greenish blue, the colour of a veritable turquoise!'

'Then what about the hole in it, you silly,' Mrs Madhusan asked sceptically. 'It is just a broken ornamental glass-

bead which had once been adorning the neck of a plough-bull.'

Madhusan was piqued.

'You don't know anything,' he exclaimed. 'Natural holes are formed in precious stones, and this hole is surely a naturally-formed one.'

Whatever his wife might say, Madhusan held to his own decision. So the next morning he took the

The first jeweller to whom Madhusan showed the stone, however, opined that it could be turquoise—only he could not say definitely as he dealt only in diamonds and never turquoise. It was also the verdict of other jewellers Madhusan consulted, and all of them advised him to show it to Kareem & Sons, the only firm in the City who were stocking turquoise.

'Damned precious it is!' he exclaimed mockingly. 'It is only a piece of blue glass.'

stone to the City to show it to the jewellers.

All the same, his mind was not free from doubt as to the genuineness of the stone. What an awkward figure, he thought, he would cut in the eyes of the jewellers were the stone to prove really valueless! He visualised shopboys chuckling at the sight of a funny man who tried to take a piece of glass for a precious stone!

As if Madhusan was not aware of this fact all along! One might look a fool before strangers, but to be jeered at by shopmen in the presence of his former classmate in the High School, was it not unthinkable to Madhusan? The fact that Batchauddin, that mischievous practical joker in his schooldays, was the son of the proprietor of Kareem & Sons made Madhusan hesitate. He imagined just what would happen in

that shop when he went there. Batchauddin was likely to be there and would say something embarassing and funny after learning his business about the stone.

Yet, the tempting thought of getting a few currency notes for the stone made him bold. Quickly Madhusan decided to go to Kareem & Sons, come what might.

Just as he expected, Batchauddin was occuping the high dais in the shop.

'Hallo!' he exclaimed as a welcome to his friend, 'what is the matter?'

'Oh, nothing,' Madhusan replied smiling, 'only I wanted to show you a sample of a stone. I believe it to be a precious stone and I want the expert opinion of your shopmen.'

'Precious? How did *you* get it?'

Madhusan explained the circumstances briefly. Batchauddin examined the stone and then broke out laughing.

'Damned precious it is!' he exclaimed mockingly. 'You need not worry yourself about it. It is only a piece of blue glass!'

'Is it not turquoise?' Madhusan asked, his hopes shattered.

'Turquoise! If a Muslim does not know a turquoise when he sees one, he is *no* Muslim. It is his favourite stone, you know.'

Beads of perspiration began to gleam on Madhusan's forehead.

'Are you sure of it?' he asked. 'I compared this with the picture in the Concise English Dictionary and. . .'

'If you don't believe me, I will prove it.'

So saying Batchauddin threw the stone into the busy street outside.

'But,' he continued as he noted the stone roll along the street and find a place of rest near the pavement on the opposite side, 'to comfort you over an unfortunate disappointment, I will give you this precious ring. Do accept this as a memento of our friendship.'

He reached out for a box of rings. Madhusan recovered from his daze. 'Make it a lady's ring!' he said suddenly inspired.

That was something, Madhusan thought, at least to show to the wife on return home. It might be passed off for the value he really got out of selling his stone!

A cunning interpretation of facts, Madhusan reflected, to prove to his wife that he was not, but only she was, wrong about the value of the stone.

If only Madhusan was aware of what happened after he had left the shop that day he would have thought about it differently.

For, as soon as Madhusan's back was turned upon the shop, a boy from Kareem & Sons ran to the opposite pavement of the street, picked up a small stone, and gave it to his master.

The little ring, Batchauddin gave away, was nothing compared to the value he got out of selling that small piece of stone—really a turquoise!

All enchantments die; only cowards die with them.—
CHARLES MORGAN.

THE WISDOM OF A LIE

By S. P. SARMA

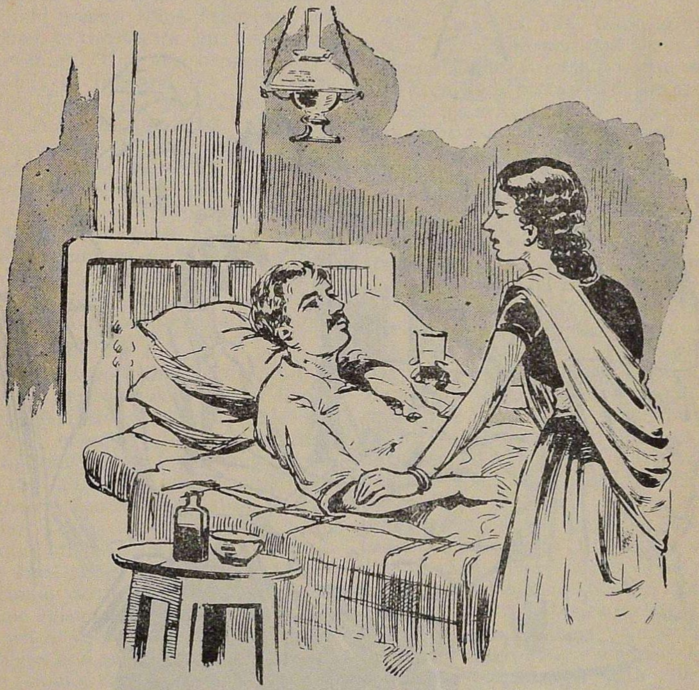
IT was a hot summer night in one of the coastal villages of South India. The breeze was either still or it blew warm from the landside. People could scarcely sleep and most of them lay stretched in the open in the quiet streets or on the terraces of their homes. A few dogs could be heard barking at irregular intervals while throughout, there was the busy and ceaseless humming of the mosquitoes in their millions. In one of the bigger houses of the village lay a man tossing on his bed, suffering from fever. He was stretched on a comfortable wooden cot which he had bought from the nearest town only a few months ago. And near him on a simple mat spread on the ground lay his wife—his nurse and partner in life. He looked wasted and much older than he really was but it was not wholly due to his illness. Manickam led a bad life and had wasted a considerable part of his property on drink and on backing wrong horses. Women too were not unknown to him: indeed rumour said that he was keeping a woman in the town. But he stoutly denied this when his wife Bagyam questioned him. On the last occasion however, his denial was clearly half-hearted. After his last visit to the town, he had fallen ill, now nearly a month ago. And the nature of the disease, even as the headman of the village could see, clearly told its own tale.

Bagyam felt the blow very keenly; she had all along believed her husband's words but she now knew better. When barely a girl of sixteen, Manickam had come to her house and obtaining her father's consent, had married her. He had then represented that he was only thirty-three years of age and that it was his first marriage. But she had soon after come to know the truth. Her husband had a daughter by his first wife who had died and his own age at the time was more than forty. Other disappointments came too; Manickam was a drunkard who would not come home regularly but would go away on long visits to the town. When asked to explain, he would some times evade answering while at others he would scold and even beat her. She saw too that he was squandering his money. The jewels he took from her to the town, now to adjust a loose screw or make anew a broken link, and now for repatterning, never came back to her. And all the village was talking about one piece of land having been mortgaged and another being sold.

The task of managing the family had always been hers but now with her husband laid up, the burden had become doubly heavy. The advice she got was quite confusing. The village doctor who came a day or two after the illness commenced his treatment by imposing a strict fast on the patient for three days. He explained that whatever the disease, fasting was good. Manickam, nevertheless, used to take some coffee stealthily but all the same, he grew very weak. Next, the doctor prescribed some decoctions as bitter as bitter could be and put the patient on diet. Weeks passed in this way but no improvement was seen. In the meanwhile, the astrologer arrived and casting the horoscope of Manickam said that Saturn was in the eighth house, which was bad—that the planet had to be appeased by the gift of mustard seeds to a Brahmin along with an anna each day for forty-eight days and that some special *pooja* too should be performed. This he himself was ready to undertake for the sake of the friendship he had had with good Manickam's father. Not content with this, there were others also, especially the old women of the village who each had her own prescribed form

of treatment. What with anxiety and lack of regular sleep or food, Bagyam's mind was utterly awry.

On the night in question, the condition of Manickam was bad. The pain was excruciating and he could not get a wink of sleep. Bagyam lay on the ground within his reach but he did not want to wake her up. She had been overworking, he felt, and needed some rest. But all unconsciously a pain shot through

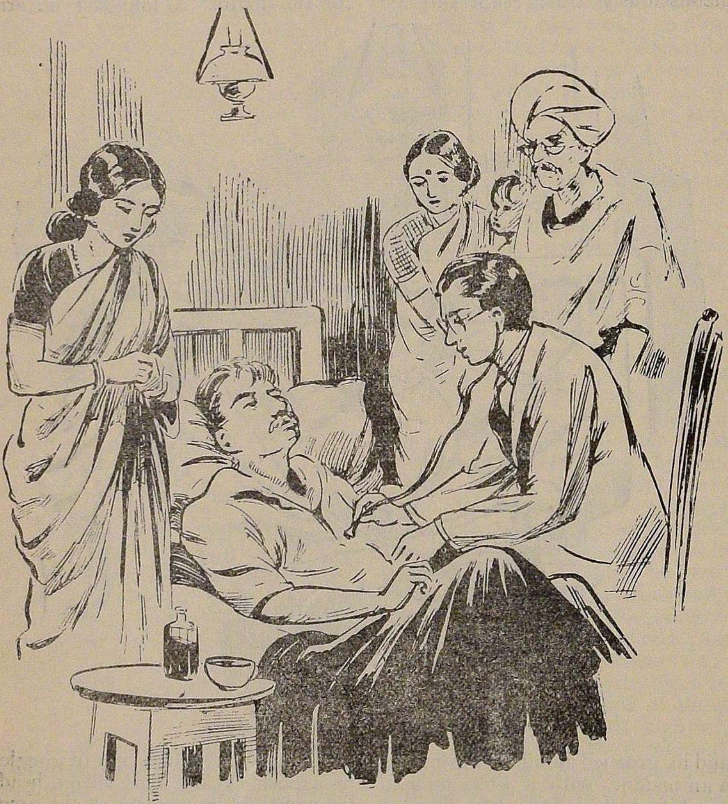


'*Bagyam was up in an instant.*'

him and he groaned aloud. Bagyam was up in an instant, with a little milk to moisten his parched lips. She pleaded that they must get the new doctor from town who was living in the neighbouring village. People said he was very clever and besides why not they try the English system of medicine too? She would send for him—the first thing in the morning—and God willing, he might be able to effect a cure. To this, all that her husband could say was a weak Yes; he had been deprived of all will-power be prolonged illness.

Morning dawned and Bagyam was ordering the servants to clean and tidy up things near the patient. She had taken her early bath as usual and said her prayers. And with her long and abundant hair tied up in a knot at the end to dry, she was looking towards the door eagerly for the doctor. At long last he arrived, a young man with a pair of goggles on, on a push cycle. The village headman happened to be near by at the time and he too entered the house. Also a number of men and women who had obviously nothing else to do. Natarajan, the doctor, did not like the crowd to disturb the patient but his words fell flat on it. He went to the bed and examined Manickam. And then seating himself on a rickety old chair he asked for details. The headman

began by narrating how good a man the patient was and how misfortune was dogging him for some time past. But this piece of information did not help Natarajan to any extent. He therefore turned to Bagyam who, out of respect and shyness, was standing a little away. But there was no help and she had herself to speak. She told him how her husband suddenly took ill one night and had been to life. But it was of an acute type and would take a long time to cure. To tell the facts however would be to shut the people around. He therefore said merely that no anxiety need be felt as to life, that such illness was quite common in towns and could be easily cured. He promised to give some injections the next day and for a week following, after which he would advise



' The doctor examined Manickam.'

bedridden ever since for nearly a month. The medicines so far had proved ineffective and maybe, through their good luck and the skilful treatment of the doctor, recovery might yet come soon.

Natarajan had not taken long to find out that the disease was not dangerous the patient to go to the town for rest along with his family.

The treatment continued day afte day and Manickam was definitely improving. There was no need for Nata-

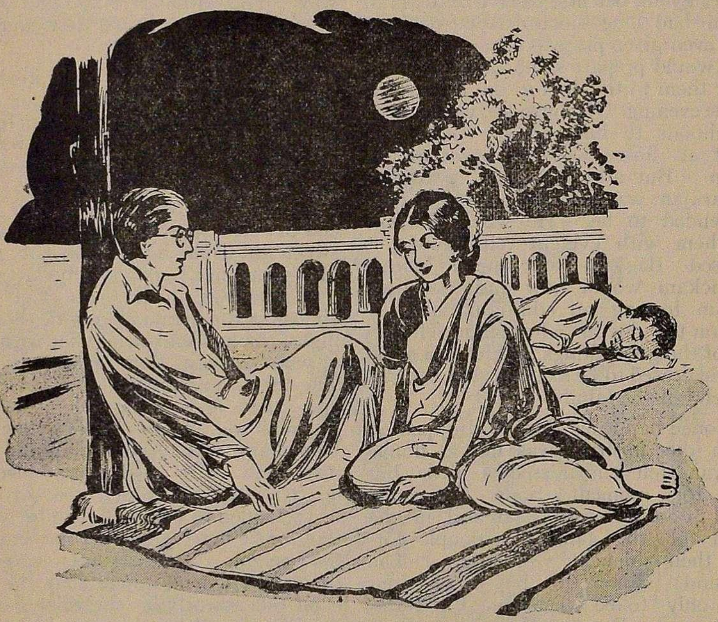
rajan coming to see the patient every day now but it had become almost a habit with him to drop in at some part of the day. Manickam and Bagyam also were getting to expect the doctor whether there was medical need or not. Bit by bit, Manickam picked up strength to go out on short walks and steadily gained his normal health. As for Bagyam, her first reserve with Natarajan had long since disappeared and had even given place to some familiarity. She would prepare some delicacies and offer them to the doctor on his arrival in the evening. Of course she would utter falsehoods to him and say that some feast at home was the occasion for them. But after the first few offers Natarajan was not deceived but only pretended to be. He would partake of them with evident relish and this pleased Bagyam very much indeed. Manickam would now and then join her in forcing an additional dish or two on the doctor who often felt too full of the good things of life. In short he had ceased to be a doctor and become a friend of the family.

It once happened that he dropped in when the husband was not at home. Bagyam felt embarassed a little but only for moment. Soon the genial flood of conversation began and in the midst of the talk, the couple forgot their delicate situation. The husband came in but was content only to be a listener. For Natarajan and Bagyam had discovered a common secret. They came from the same village and indeed were playmates when young. Their parents were neighbours and great friends. Their memories rambled through the time when they were lad and lass and the splendid sportive hours they had. Bagyam asked for news of old families and friends of the village which Natarajan could furnish only in part. Suddenly in the midst of all this, the young man laughed at the thought of one particular recollection. He asked her if she had forgotten her Satyavan and lo! she was all blushes. Manickam could not understand the joke and to him, Natarajan explained that when young he and Bagyam had often played as husband and wife and that on one accasion, she was Savitri and he himself the dead Satyavan whom she brought back to life. The husband promptly replied that his wife was truly Savitri, for no woman could have served her husband better than Bagyam had served him during his recent illness. Months passed in this way. The visits of Natarajan indeed became less frequent but they were the more eagerly looked for.

Manickam was now back in the full side of his old life and had begun to indulge in his dissipations. Bagyam felt this very keenly and protested to her husband against his evil ways but to no purpose. Day in and day out, there were continual quarrels at home now. And at the end of them generally Manickam would sweep out of the house and not put in his appearance back for days together. The sufferings of Bagyam had come almost to the breaking point when one night, the husband struck her with a log of wood which hurt her near the eye. The next evening, Natarajan came and the first thing he asked of Bagyam was as to her swollen eye. Manickam was present too and both man and wife told some piece of lie to Natarajan, which for his part he pretended to believe. But he was no fool for he nearly guessed the cause of the swelling. He had been observing things of late, and noting that the husband was scarcely in the village whenever he came there on one of his usual visits, and remarking about it, Bagyam had told him that Manickam had gone to town on business which would keep him there for a couple of days or more but always with the demeanour of one who was obliged to utter lies. Natarajan knew also that his erstwhile patient had gone back to his old ways of life and had when visiting him asked him to be careful. But it appeared nowadays that Manickam was purposely absenting himself from home when Natarajan called; or if he was present would go out on some excuse, leaving his wife to talk to the doctor. On the present occasion, Natarajan insisted on examining the swelling on

Bagyam's eye and after doing that, he prescribed some fomentation. In his own mind, he was sure that the husband had hit the wife and the swelling was the result. But he kept his mouth shut though his anger knew no bounds at the treatment his girl-friend was receiving.

a room and arranged a fresh bed there, and lastly kept ready hot water for the evening bath. Manickam was glad at his wife's sense of hospitality and in fact cut a joke at her expense by saying she was doing all that only to her Satyavan. Natarajan too was overwhelmed and he gently protested against



'They sat chatting under the moon.'

Some days later, he had to stay overnight in the village so as to be readily available in a case of typhoid and both Manickam and Bagyam insisted that he should stay with them for dinner and also sleep under their roof. He had not done them that honour at any time, they said. Natarajan indeed had no other decent place to stay that night but even if he had had, he would certainly have chosen to be with his friends. The whole of that evening, Bagyam was flying about the house on wings of indescribable joy. She ordered special delicates to be cooked for the guest that night; she herself cleaned up

her lavishness. But she only said that what she had done was nothing at all and it would not be enough recompense even if she slaved for him all her life, for had he not given her back her husband?

The meal was over. Bagyam herself served it, coolly ignoring all protests on the part of Natarajan against her giving unusually large quantities to him. Next, the men repaired to the terrace where they sat under the beautiful moon chatting for a while. Presently, Bagyam joined them with slices of mango placed in silver plates and with pan and scented nuts.

'Have you eaten?' asked Natarajan of her.

'No hurry for me,' she replied.

He frowned rougishly and said: 'That will not do. You please eat and come. Bagyam would not go. Finally, he threatened not to touch one slice of mango till she came back and realising he was serious, she went out. But in practically no time she was back. Together the three partook of the fruit and later of the pan. And so they sat on talking aimlessly while Manickam feeling drowsy, slept away on the spot after a time.

The influence of nature on the human mind is unfathomable. The night was getting to be perfectly quiet and the moon clearer and more enjoyable, as the hours sped away and the young man and the woman still talked on. They forgot everything except themselves. Their moods too changed, gradually becoming lighter on either side. Bagyam felt unusually elated. She could scarcely sit for joy. Her laughter became frequent, prolonged, and even loud, all unknown to herself. The most commonplace thing tickled her and she burst out laughing, swaying sideways in her joyous exuberance. Natarajan was very happy too but he was more restrained in expressing his happiness. He was puzzled at the attitude of his companion who had never been so free before. To please her, he also laughed but not very freely or often. At some moments, however, she appeared to him to be extraordinarily beautiful. Guilty thoughts, but he could not suppress them. She was two or three years younger to himself; twenty-five, and that was the period of full bloom for woman. Was she not charming—her braided hair full of jasmine and roses, her dark sari twisting round her well-rounded figure and displaying it to better advantage? But it was wrong to think so. Thus absorbed, he would miss a question or a remark of hers, and at this she would burst out laughing once more while he would sit blinking and admiring.

Somewhere in the recesses of her mind, Bagyam knew her behaviour was not proper but she had no power to check herself. She had not been so happy before and did not want to deny herself a bit of the large happiness she was enjoying now. Their talk was for a time about the relative advantages of town life and village life. Natarajan was for the latter while she preferred town life at all costs.

'Townspeople are clever,' she said. 'You are one yourself and only you could cure my husband, not any of these village shepherds.'

'But here, life is so quiet and innocent. We are rather a wicked lot.'

'Oh! you do'nt know our village folk. They are as bad as they could be. Why, you are a very bad man, aren't you?' She asked coquettishly.

'Who knows?' he said, and then realised the truth underlying his query.

'And he is very good, of course?' she continued ironically pointing to her sleeping husband.

Natarajan felt embarrassed and merely said in reply, not meaning at all what he said, 'why, yes, he is a good man.'

At this, she grew suddenly angry. The extremity of joy at once changed to the extremity of anger. She darted one piercing glance at him and the very next instant, smiled.

'I have merely become an object of joke for you,' she said pouting her lips. 'If you had been in my place. . .' and she laughed away the rest of the sentence.

'But you should not have married an old man,' he smiled and then suddenly realised his indiscretion.

'Is my husband old? not at all,' she claimed very insincerely. And there was a wistful look of pain in her eyes.

Talks about her husband she generally avoided, but to-night she was in the grip of an uncontrollable force. The topic once started and sure of a sympathetic listener, she lowered her voice and began to narrate stories that the sleeping Manickam would not have found to his taste. And at the end of each story, the pair had a hearty laugh.

'Why does he want to go to the town ?' she demanded. 'Am I dead or am I one-eyed and ugly ?.'

She was getting angry and Natarajan soothingly replied : 'The ways of men are strange. But I may tell you a town girl in your position would have acted differently.

'What do you mean ? She would have committed suicide ! I thought of doing it but something prevented me.'

'Suicide ? I do not mean it at all. A town girl would have. . .'

'Yes, say it out.'

'She would have formed her own friendship and been happy.'

'That is just the thing for these people,' she said, pointing to her husband.

And thus the night glided by. The clock struck eleven ; yet the pair talked on. They were both excited highly. When their throat got parched, they helped themselves to the milk placed in a jug before them and then continued. More than once, conversation lagged and yet as neither was willing to go away, some one would begin a topic which would engage them for a while more.

Another transformation too was taking place in their minds though they did not notice it. The dazzling vision of beauty that had presented itself to Natarajan in the earlier part of the night was ever present with him. While his outer mind was talking to Bagyam, in apparent calm, his inner mind was thoroughly agitated. Very dimly he realised that he longed to seize the beautiful creature before him and clasp her in his arms, never again to let her go. But as often as he realised it, he brushed it aside as evil and unworthy of him. Yet the very next moment it would revive with greater strength at some look of Bagyam's or some other aspect of her charms. It was a keen struggle for him, the greater part of that night. He could not go away from the place nor resist the thoughts that were surging up in him like a fury.

For her part, Bagyam had lost all control over herself. The picture of youth and manly vigour before her compared very favourably somewhere at the back of her mind, with the drunken and foul-smelling sot of her husband. She began to detest the sleeping man near by and to a corresponding extent, to adore the figure before her. She recollected that as a child she had played the wife of this handsome young man. Why did she not marry him ? she asked herself. They belonged to different castes, came the reply from somewhere. But what did caste matter ? came the counter-query. She had never felt towards her husband what she was feeling towards this young man to-night. In her own eyes and in those of God, she was the wife, not of Manickam but of Natarajan, was she not ? Of course these thoughts did not form themselves one after another, nor very clearly. But they were mounting up in her like billows and were irresistible. She tried hard to force them down and perhaps succeeded for a second. She looked up, and at the fierce and devouring eyes of Natarajan, quailed and cast her eyes down, with intense pleasure. She knew she expected that look in him and would have been disappointed if she had not met it. Suddenly she felt a burning desire to crumple up, to annihilate herself, to give herself away to anything. He was feeling quite fresh, as at early dawn. She fixed her stormy eyes on Natarajan, for a second, for two, three seconds. Then instinct told her she was on the brink of a precipice and she recoverd lost ground only for a few minutes, when the inner conflict began again.

Such was the mental state of the two souls who were nevertheless trying to preserve a deceptive calm in their talk. Each realised what was passing in the mind of the other and knew the magazine was ready to explode. One word from him, one gesture, one slight touch and Bagyam knew she would be in his arms, ready to yield him her all, his very slave. Indeed, she was expecting the moment, dreading it, and wishing for it. For his part Natarajan was mad with joy and was proud of his conquest, but was afraid to take the

fateful step. She might be displeased, offended, he thought.

The atmosphere was thus charged with suppressed passions when Manickam turned on his side and began his asthmatic cough. The chill breezes of the night had affected him. Suddenly, Natarajan got up and stalked out, he with the guilty mind. Manickam saw his wife sitting up alone and asked her to tell him the hour of the night. She did not know. Where was the doctor? He had gone to bed long since, lied she, the doctor's companion in guilt. A lie covering up a guilt—this connected them together.

The old man, after recovering from his spasms, went into the bedroom asking his wife to follow him. She went in but with long and lingering looks at Natarajan who was coming up at a distance. Finally she disappeared.

Natarajan had preferred to sleep in the open and so his bed had been arranged in the verandah. He sat on the bed. The perfect stillness of the moonlit night made him feel lonely. He could not even close his eyes; he did not stretch himself either. On the contrary, he felt full of energy, almost like running and jumping about. He sat long on the bed but feeling quite oppressed began to walk about the terrace. He felt irritated. What a fool he was making himself, he thought. But that did not bring him sleep either.

The first cock crowed. He surmised it was about three in the morning. Thinking at last to rest his limbs he turned towards the bed when lo! whom should he see but Bagyam? He was not surprised. She was standing near him with head bent and downcast eyes, her well-formed figure erect and her right toe drawing absurd lines on the ground.

'How is it you are here?' he aksed and at once felt the stupidity of the question.

There was no reply.

'Is your husband asleep?'

'He is full drunk,' came the drawling reply.

He felt an invitation in her tone and posture. Slowly, yet hesitatingly, he stretched forth his hand and took hers in it. She was stiff but not unyielding; slowly she raised her head and looked into his eyes, a devouring look of burning passion. That was all he knew. The very next instant he was in a fierce grip. Like a panther she was on him, clinging to his body like his very clothes, entwining herself round him like a creeper. She was straining him to herself and kissing away his lips, his throat, his eyes, his cheeks, his very shirt. He was amazed at her burning desire and could do nothing but stand still and maintain his balance. Soon she relaxed, evidently fatigued, and looked up into his eyes submissively as though he were her protector and lord. But what did she see there? A pair of burning coal-lumps consuming her with passion. She was taken aback at the sight. She began to fear him and tried to edge away. But she little knew the volcanic depths she had stirred up in him. The flood-gates had been violently burst open and the resulting overflow carried him and her off their feet. Her attempt to edge away made him almost ferocious. In one bound, he caught her leg, then her waist, and clasped her to himself almost crushing her with his strong arms. He was mad; he imprinted burning kisses on her face and throat and bosom. He glued his lips to hers while she, all resistance gone, was submissive like a wax doll in his hands. He was feeling like eating her up. He did not know what else he did. When his fit of madness was over, he came back to his prosaic surroundings and realised what he had done. He was sorry, sincerely sorry. He looked at Bagyam who was leaning on him thoroughly exhausted and unable to stand by herself. She was sorry also, he imagined. He lifted her downcast face by the chin and made her look up. What a transformation! Instead of radiance, he saw paleness on her face. Suddenly they heard voices; cowherds in the neighbouring house were talking as they fed the cows. How long had they been together, they did not know. The reclining form of Bagyam slowly stiffened. Fear had over-

taken her. What enormities had she committed ! It all happened in a second. She shook off the hands that clasped her and as though from mortal danger, rushed towards her room. Natarajan who was in a trance of bliss felt his arms suddenly empty and realised what had taken place. Like a fool he ran after her, but too late. The bedroom door shut with a bang.

It is difficult to love and to be wise. Natarajan went up to his bed sorely disappointed and sat on it, hoping she would come back but sure that she would not. Time flew past: soon it was dawn. And at once he felt an urge to run away from the place. Morning advanced and he was in the next village and in his own house. Days passed but he had not the face to go and see Bagyam or Manickam. At last the summons came. The doctor was wanted to see Bagyam who was ill. Quickly as though on wings, he flew to her. But what was his surprise when Bagyam whom he expected be in bed herself came to the door smiling to receive him. Her husband was not at home, she explained. But why had the doctor not come all these days ? Was he angry ?

'Angry ? Oh no !' he replied, as he understood now from whom the call came.

'I simply couldn't come. I am sorry for what happened that day.' His head was bent.

Bagyam was embarassed but she had more self-control. She said, slyly and slowly : 'It was not your fault. It is the woman who is to blame in such cases.'

'I do not know but what is past is past. Let us talk no more about it.' he replied.

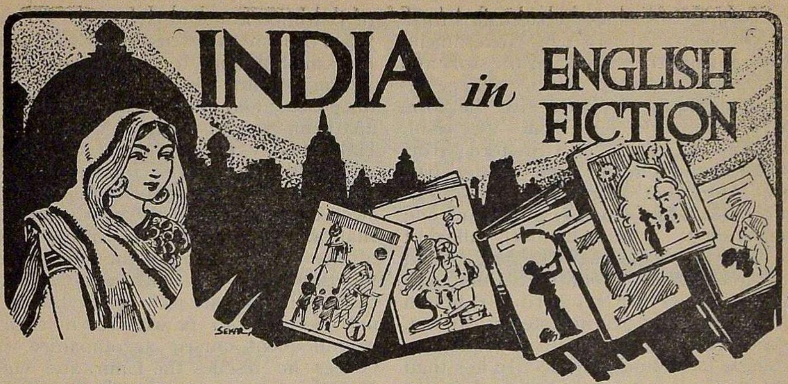
'God helped me that night and I pray that He would help me hereafter too.'

And she went into the inner apartments to mix coffee for her friend. Manickam now came into the house exclaiming, 'Why, doctor, you have forgotten us, it seems ? Need you not come here if nobody is ill ?'

'No, the overfeeding that night in your house upset my stomach,' lied Natarajan.

WHERE the mind is without fear and the head is held high ;
Where knowledge is free ;
Where the world has not been broken into fragments by narrow domestic walls ;
Where words come out from the depth of truth
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection ;
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit ;
Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action—
Into that heaven of freedom, my frather, let my country awake.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE.



"" Let me always remember this. When the pressure and force of the West, the smell of petrol and the roar of traffic, are shattering my nerves, let me have this as a remedy against fear."' Miss Cicely Farmer about the spiritual light and beauty of India in " Sunrise Over India."

'FRANCIS MARION CRAWFORD, novelist and historian was born on the 2nd August, 1854 in Bagni di Lucca, Tuscany, the youngest of four children of Thomas Crawford, an American sculptor long resident in Italy, and of Louisa Cutler Ward, a sister of Julia Ward Howe. He was early sent to relatives at Bordentown, N. J., but on the death of his father was returned to Italy where his mother still made her home. The boy's education from the first was thorough and peculiarly cosmopolitan. "Most of my boyhood," he wrote in later years, " was spent under the direction of a French governess. Not only did I learn her language of her, but all of my studies, geography, arithmetic and so forth were taught me in French and I learned to write it with great readiness as a mere boy because it was the language of my daily tasks. The consequence is that to this day I write French with the ease of English." Between the ages of twelve and fourteen he was a pupil at St. Paul's School, Concord, N. H., and during the following ten years he was successively student of mathematics and Greek at Rome; student with a tutor at Hatfield Broadoak, Essex, England; matriculant at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he pursued courses in German, Swedish and Spanish; and attendant upon lectures at Karlsruhe and Heidelberg. As a result he became fluent in most of the languages of Europe including the Turkish and the Russian, and later learned to converse in most of the Eastern languages. At twenty-two he was at the University of Rome specializing in the study of Sanskrit in which he had become intensely interested, and it was to perfect himself in this language at its fountain head that in 1879, borrowing the money to pay his expenses, he went to India. In financial straits at length, he turned, like Kipling in later years, to journalism; for eighteen months he served as editor of the *Indian Herald* at Allahabad. He returned to Rome in 1880 and the next year was in America pursuing studies in Sanskrit at Harvard, making his home with his aunt Julia Ward Howe. Unsettled, perplexed as to what was to be his life-work, supporting himself precariously with hackwork sold to papers and magazines, in May 1882, while in New York City the guest of his uncle Samuel Ward, he told at a dinner the story of one Jacobs, a diamond merchant of Simla, whose

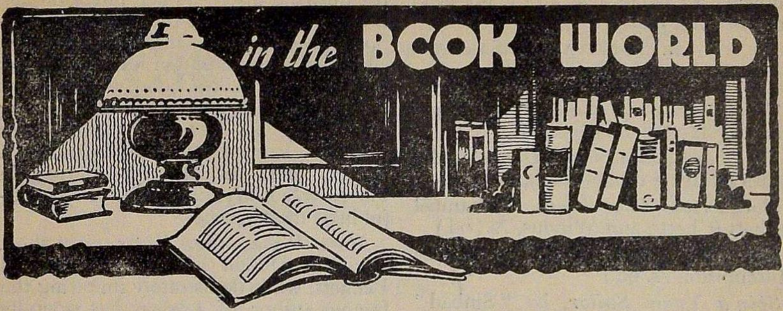
sale of an unusual stone had called forth a protest from the British Government. Recognising the interest of the story and the graphic power of the telling, his uncle urged him to put it into the form of a novel and publish it. The result was *Mr Issacs** which Crawford wrote in less than six weeks, the greater part of it at his aunt's home in Boston. The success of the novel was instant and sensational. It was the most talked of book of its season. Crawford had found his profession. From that time until his death on the 9th April 1909 fiction flowed from his pen in a steady stream, often two or three volumes coming in a single publishing season. In less than twenty-five years he produced more than forty novels, not to mention other works historical and critical.' (Dictionary of American Biography).

Though it is a little surprising to hear that *Mr Isaacs* "was the most talked of book of its season," the book, for the first novel of an author, is fascinating indeed. The story is well woven and has the elements of a mystery-thriller with a good love episode. Abdul Hafiz-ben-Isak is the real name of "Mr Isaacs." He is a very rich and learned Persian, a master of languages. In Simla he meets an American journalist, Paul Griggs by name, and from an acquaintance ends in becoming a great friend of his. He then confides to Griggs that he is in love with Katharine Westonhaugh the niece of a revenue collector and that he is engaged in the delicate task of releasing the Emir of Afghanistan who is a prisoner in the hands of the Rajah of Baithopoor. And Griggs is present when Isaacs threatens the Rajah with blackmail, flinging forth that he is harbouring traitors to the British Raj in his palace; and the Rajah indignantly anathemises that when "Your (Abdul Hafiz's) body has been eaten of jackals and wild pigs in the forest, your soul shall enter into the shape of a despised sweeper, and you and your offspring shall scavenge the streets of the cities of my kingdom and of the kingdom of my son and my son's son, to ten thousand generations." But Isaacs is not a Hindu to be withered by such a magniloquent curse; accompanied by Griggs he rescues the Emir, and when everything seems to end well, they hear, on their return to Simla, that Katharine Westonhaugh is very ill and dying. A friend of Isaacs, Ram Lal, who has been appearing and disappearing in the course of the story, enters now; Katharine dies; and Ram Lal and Isaacs iris away together.

Mr Isaacs holds us to the end with unflagging interest; character, scene, and action achieve a simple and beautiful unity. Crawford is primarily a story-teller, a brilliant raconteur; "to him the novel was 'a pocket theatre' exclusively for entertainment; propaganda, or moral teaching, or the shedding of light upon the meaning of life was no part of its province." Time is fleeting; we don't want novelists who tax our heads (Meredith is in his grave, his sleep is disturbed); a character like Mr Isaacs is a gay companion; adventures like his build a romantic villa; and we have no need for granite mansions.

AN INDO-ANGLIAN.

*Macmillan, 3s, 6d.



INDO-ENGLISH

The Idiot's Wife, by Dr. Naresh Chander Sen Gupta (G. A. Natesan, Madras. 8 As.)

THE IDIOT'S WIFE is a short tale of a strong character having a psychological collapse in the hour of triumph. An unusually good and talented girl finds herself mated to a half-wit, but she proposes to herself the very enjoyable task of teaching, guiding, and protecting him. On the death of her father-in-law she gets into litigation with her brother-in-law to save herself and her beloved husband. The news of success brings fever and—death to the half-wit and Narayani's one motive of action is gone. She renounces in favour of her brother-in-law to whom she is reconciled. The story is interesting. In the latter part, events develop rapidly while the former part rather drags on.

The story is Bengali in the original and is translated into English by the author himself. The author has written, as some would talk English. Colourless and insipid, the English abounds in clumsy phrases and loose colloquial careless expressions. In get-up, the book is a typical Natesan publication.

V. RAGHAVAN

Creatures All, by Shanker Ram (A. N. Purnah & Co., Madras, 12 as.)

SOUTH Indian short stories have a way of dealing with stereotyped themes—unemployed graduates, mother-in-law, and the marriage market. It is a pleasant change from propaganda to the pristine simplicity of rural life, and Mr Shanker Ram is to be congratulated on having brought out a collection of six stories treating of Telugu peasant life. The setting of the stories is faithful to fact and the creation of atmosphere has been a success. The kindliness and good feeling that pervade the book make it wholesome reading. Another point of note is that the author has succeeded in writing flawless English. The style throughout is so simple and unstrained that the book, we feel, is bound to be a favourite with schoolboys. Viewed from a higher standard than the schoolboy's, of course there is muchof amateurishness and puerility about some of the stories. We feel sometimes, as we read along, that the author has missed the quintessence of the short story. The buffalo story, for example, "When One Wound Can Heal Another" is a dismal failure; its false originality verges almost upon the ludicrous. "The Fruits of Kindness" is a tragedy of technique: here is a lack of organic unity about the facts and the climax goes off too faintly. The rajah of the last story is a schoolboy hero —not a hero of flesh and blood. None of the characters lingers in the brain after you have read the stories. They fade into nothingness the moment you put down the book. Overlooking these sundry blemishes, the stories are interesting. A strong point in favour of the book is that the sights and smells of Teluguland have got into it and make it agreeable. The stories do not provoke thinking or stir the imagination; they merely

follow with a monotous gait the noiseless tenor of rural life.

P. S. NATARAJA SARMA

ENGLISH

Tom Tiddler's Ground, by Edward Shanks (Macmillan 8s. 6d.)

The Lonely Lady of Dulwich, by Maurice Baring (Heinemann, 5s.)

More Pricks than Kicks, by Samuel Beckett (Chatto and Windus, 7s. 6d.)

Paradise for Sale, by Sir Philip Gibbs (Hutchinson, 7s. 6d.)

Spin a Yarn, Sailor, by "Sinbad" (Harrap, 7s. 6d.)

EDWARD SHANKS has crowded the material for three full-length novels in *Tom Tiddler's Ground*, but the crowding does not make the story cumbrous or cryptic; it is a perfect triumph in craftsmanship. Tom Florey is not a conventional hero; his weaknesses are so human that never for a moment does he forfeit our sympathy and affection. From the time he leaves his father's inn in Cornwall to to that last tragic night in a Berlin hotel —a tutor in Germany, a private secretary to a member of Parliament, a person of importance in Whitehall, and finally a commercial magnate, Tom's is an exceedingly varied life—he is constantly before us, revealing facet after facet of his character. Mr Shanks has let himself go when he describes Tom's days in Germany as a tutor—this is the most interesting part of the book. Ambitiously planned, *Tom Tiddler's Ground* is indeed an achievement in fiction; it establishes fully Mr Shanks's skill as a novelist and his genius to group facts with the precision of a historian.

An author who has established his reputation generally grows careless with his later productions but Mr Maurice Baring is not guilty of this lapse in *The Lonely Lady of Dulwich*. It is a short novel and treats of life in high society. Zita Harmer is a very beautiful woman but childless; the wife of a banker she has all except her husband's sense in her *personal-ness*. Wanting to run off with a French poet and novelist she is content to stay with him when her husband discovers her intention and behaves with infinite tact and courtesy. Some years after she meets a journalist and falls passionately in love with him; the journalist makes good through her and in gratitude breaks Zita's heart by announcing his engagement to another woman. Irony here is in the hands of a master, and Mr Maurice Baring, in *The Lonely Lady*, has given us a beautiful little masterpiece.

More Pricks than Kicks gives short stories of Dublin life and Mr Samuel Beckett, while deliberately imitating the famous author of *Ulysses* has woefully failed to understand his art, the Joyceian word magic and intuitive intensity. It is Mr Beckett that wants to appear clever, and this cleverness he denies his characters.

The novelettes in *Paradise for Sale* are typically Gibbsian; the situations are stereotyped throughout but Gibbs does not bore the reader; he has the knack to tell what we like to hear, not a bit more. "Mother of the Gods" is the best of the bunch.

In the preface to *Spin a Yarn, Sailor*, the anonymous author of *A Modern Sinbad* says that one of the stories 'was thought to be of sufficient merit to secure the award of the O. Henry Prize in America, which I, being British, was not qualified to accept, and was forced to refuse.' We have mighty sea-stories from the pens of Joseph Conrad, Herman Melville, and Pierre Loti but "Sinbad" has something brainier and brinier to contribute to the sea-literature. To use a Meredithian sentence, his words are like stars on the skirt of a storm. As an instance: 'Down in the dark waist of the ship men stumbled and cursed at the fife rails, seeking for the gear in black chaos. Streams of water poured down from the saturated sails. A spear of yellow light touched the group with devilish radiance as the carpenter carried his lantern round, examining hatch fastenings. A shrill unhuman voice screamed at the braces, singing the ropes through the sheaves.' "Sinbad" has the might and grandeur of the decuman wave.

MANJERI S. ISVARAN